



**MAINE DEPARTMENT OF INLAND FISHERIES & WILDLIFE**

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**Commissioner Woodcock's Remarks On Maine's Game Plan for Deer**

Maine Department of Inland Fisheries and Wildlife Commissioner Chandler Woodcock gave the following remarks today when presenting Maine's Game Plan for Deer with Gov. Paul LePage, Senate President Kevin Raye, House Speaker Robert Nutting, Sen. David Trahan, legislators, members of the IF&W Advisory Council, Maine Warden Service Col. Joel Wilkinson and invited guests.

Before presenting the remarks, Commissioner Woodcock expressed appreciation to Gov. LePage and members of the Maine Legislature for their support of the Department's efforts to improve Maine's deer herds in northern, eastern and western Maine. He thanked these Department's outdoor partners for their participation and input as well: Sportsman's Alliance of Maine, Maine Professional Guides Association, Forest Products Council of Maine, The Nature Conservancy, Maine Audubon, the Small Woodlot Owners Association of Maine, and other partners.

Commissioner Woodcock added, "And, most importantly, I want to thank Wildlife Biologist Sandy Ritchie, state Deer Biologist Lee Kantar, Wildlife Division Director Mark Stadler, and the entire IF&W staff for working on this effort."

### **Commissioner Woodcock's Remarks**

It's a fact that cannot be disputed: Maine's deer are widely loved and appreciated by **ALL** of the people of Maine. We like to watch them as they graze in a chopping, be surprised by a fawn venturing across our backyards, and hunt them to put food on our tables.

While we find peace in knowing that deer are in Maine's woods, we also need to be realistic about a few facts regarding deer, their populations in our state, and how they are managed:

First, Maine is at the northern limit of range for deer, particularly in northern, western and eastern Maine. If you go 100 miles into Quebec, you will reach the end of their range. Go south, into Pennsylvania and other states, and you'll find healthy populations. Even in our own state deer populations vary – more in the south, fewer in the north, west and east.

Second, there is not one single factor for the low numbers of deer in parts of our state. You can't solely blame coyotes or bears. They play a part, but are not the only reason. Just as culpable are severe winters, the loss of quality habitats and deer yards, poaching, vehicle collisions and winter feeding. We can't control Maine winters. Wish we could. But we can work together on reducing all of the dangers to herds.

Third, no one is to blame for the herd reduction in some regions of Maine. I've heard hunters claim that mismanagement on the part of the Department of Inland Fisheries and Wildlife caused the numbers to go down. That's not true. Our biologists and wardens are just as interested in maintaining strong deer numbers as hunters, and devote their careers to the study of deer, the way they live in Maine, the causes that affect their numbers, and the prevention of illegal taking by poachers.

Fourth, throughout Maine's history, we have experienced ebbs and flows in deer population. I remember talking to sportsmen about a decline in the 1970s. We're at that point again.

So what are we – all of us – going to do about it?

Today we present Maine's Game Plan for Deer. It's on our website right now for the public to see. Please, take a look. It's not IF&W's plan – it's Maine's plan. It's broken into sections according to

issues, like any good plan, but not one issue stands alone. Two of them carry more weight than others – the need for quality deer wintering areas and the effort to reduce predation -- but all of them need to be worked on, by everyone, for this plan to work.

In a lot of ways, this plan is not new. How we implement it is. In 2008, after a year of time spent on research and discussions, the Northern and Eastern Maine Deer Task Force presented its deer management recommendations to the Joint Legislative Committee on Inland Fisheries and Wildlife. These recommendations now guide the Department's current deer management program. Also in 2008, the Deer Predation Working Group presented its recommendations on how to address coyotes and bears' impact on herds. These recommendations guide IF&W's current predator management program.

And, in January, Sen. David Trahan and George Smith convened a one-day deer workshop, which was well attended by sportsmen, guides and outfitters. The strategy that came from that event melds well with the findings of the Northern and Eastern Maine Deer Task Force.

All of the recommendations are incorporated into the plan being announced today and aptly called "Maine's Game Plan for Deer." This plan will guide IF&W. We want you to ask yourself, "Will it guide you as well?"

Let's start with deer wintering areas. To survive Maine winters, deer move to dense conifer forests, most of which are on private lands. In the late 1970s, northern, eastern and western Maine experienced a severe outbreak of spruce budworm, which defoliated, weakened and killed entire stands of balsam fir and spruce. The spruce budworm changed mature conifer forests to younger stands. We issued a warning back then, saying it would take 30 years or more for the forests to mature. And it has.

Also, during the last couple of decades, Maine has witnessed a change in how private lands are owned and managed. Gone are the days of a few private landowners. Recent trends indicate an increased frequency of land sales, as well as annual increases in harvested areas. That affects deer wintering areas.

This is what we need to do to address this. As Gov. LePage mentioned, our department already is doing a good job working with landowners on cooperative agreements to establish and protect deer wintering areas. We will continue to do so, because having landowners on our side – landowners who

understand that deer yards are good for Maine's bottom line and not just theirs – is important for Maine's future.

That's a great start. Next up, with the support of Gov. LePage, we are going to look at this situation as opportunity to secure funding from Lands for Maine's Future to establish and protect deer wintering areas in locations where they are most needed.

On the issue of predation, as Gov. LePage pointed out, we will be immediately implementing a predation plan that will be targeted and sustained in documented deer wintering areas. It needs to be done. And today we ask sportsmen to ask themselves, "What can I do to help decrease predation?" You may find ideas in this plan.

Legislatively, a number of bills are being introduced that reflect well of this game plan. We encourage the public to look at those bills and contact their legislators to urge their support. A few bills are controversial, and some that don't take into account the role of our management plans. We need you to think about our state's future, and the hunting and wildlife watching opportunities we want to enjoy for years to come.

The Maine Department of Inland Fisheries and Wildlife already is building on its deer management efforts to jump start this plan. Along with the Forest Products Council of Maine and the Small Woodland Owners Association of Maine, we've established deer wintering area guidelines.

We're taking to the air, conducting more aerial surveys to document deer wintering areas and to study populations. The Departments of Conservation and Marine Resources are helping us in this effort, augmenting Maine Warden Service aircraft and pilots.

We're in the field conducting deer productivity surveys, and we're working with the Department of Transportation to develop highly visible signs to alert drivers to deer in areas where there's a high rate of collisions.

Also, we will be going throughout the state, including attending sportsman shows and rod and gun club meetings, to promote this plan. For example, I'll be in Presque Isle on March 25 to speak at a deer

forum. I encourage all of you to come on board and help us, just like a number of leading outdoor groups have promised to do.

We are on Facebook. Become our friend. Visit our website often. It will contain information on what we're doing, tips on what you can do. The next online issue of Maine Fish and Wildlife will be all about deer. Please read it on our website next month.

In closing, I would like to again thank Governor LePage for his leadership and support on this important issue.

This effort is going to take time. It won't happen overnight or in a year. We're going to make great strides. I'm confident of that.

Thank you!